/14 cont./

folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager. Their only musical instrument is the achangur, a balalaika, and even this has been borrowed (to judge from the name) from the Grusians (Grusian: chonguri). Abkhaz versification for the most part is governed by alliteration. Examples:

Varvultu --- barfuntu

Chilar marda qulardam

Arba arba sinarba

Masta mastarou

Masta stakhou

Siamul utsa

Siamul siakhou

Siandzhar utsa.

/15/

II.

Home-life of the Abkhaz -- Family -- Position of Women.

The whole domestic life of the Abkhaz is arranged so unpretentiously that all the necessary household articles, with the exception of iron things, are produced by the Abkhaz himself from materials which are at hand. The smith's trade, which requires a certain special technical knowledge, is left in the hands of special craftsmen. In every village there are two or three blacksmiths who will produce anything the Abkhaz needs from a piece of iron which he gives them. The smiths are highly regarded by the community and their craft itself has sacred significance in the eyes of the Abkhaz.

Trading is considered a shameful occupation, and the Abkhaz therefore do not engage in it, but if it were developed, the Abkhaz could sell many things at a profit. For instance, the Abkhaz women, who, by the way, are great masters of all kinds of home crafts, produce from sheep and goat skins the

/31 cont./

771 whatever stood out most sharply and acted most strongly upon their almost childish imagination" (1). Madame Giorgidze says: "At

1. See Sborn. sved. o kavk. gorts., No. V.

present the majority of the Abkhaz profess the Christian religion, the minority Mohammedan. In spite of this, the Abkhaz is little informed in either of the two religions and is really a heathen rather than Christian or Moslem" (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888.

1.

775 766 The Souls of the Dead -- Their Wanderings on Earth

The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, /32/ or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried. It is not enough, therefore, to take a drowned body out of the river to bury it, for the soul of the deceased must also be evoked from the water and brought into the grave in which the body of the drowned man is buried. This is the ceremony of the evocation and capture of a drowned person's soul. Men and women gather on both sides of the river from which the corpse of the drowned man has been recovered. Across the river, from one bank to the other, a silk thread is stretched, from which a leather knapsack is hung, its lower end almost touching the water. The men and women then begin to the sound of the balalaika. The Abkhaz is convinced that the soul of the dead leaves the water and enters the knapsack when it hears the sounds of the balalaika and the singing. When the Abkhaz think that the soul has entered the bag, one of the men jumps into the water and ties it up. They then carry the

[534] [533]

[772 cont.]

C 533 Art and play. The old traditions of the past and of the deeds of the Cherkess were preserved by the wandering minstrels (gegwako); they used to sing of them at feasts and festivals, whereas nowadays they present hardly anything but songs of congratulation and praise and comic songs. As far as is known, the A 538 folk literature of the Abkhaz is rich in religious and festive songs and prayer formulas, and probably also in heroic and other

A [534]

Fig. 452. Guitar with two strings, Abkhaz (1/7 natural size) (Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg).

A 534 songs. As accompaniment to the singing, a two or three-stringed guitar is used (Abkhaz, ap'khirtsa, see Fig. 452) or the Mingrel lute (atšangur), the handle of which is sometimes carved or shaped in the form of a head. In addition, the C 534 Cherkess still use long flutes (tšebizga) of reed or metal, with three finger-holes, and triangular harps (pšine-duk-okyo), which also occur among the Swan; they are 20 to 70 centimeters wide and have 40-centimeter-long hair strings attached to the resonator and to pegs above.

A 535 The favorite dance among the Abkhaz is the "shoulder-dance," in which the young people hold each other by the hand, [773] turn around as they sing, and from time to time leap in C 535 the air. Among the Cherkess there were girls' dances (denyola), in which they hopped in one place, round dances of men and girls (uk) combined with singing, and wild war-dances (kofa) performed by a single fully-armed man.

A 536 The principal amusements of the men are contests of strength, stone-casting, ball-throwing, and the like. The Abkhaz used to fight duels with the sword, usually while sitting